Kiyoshi "Knuckles" Matsuo was born March 20, 1927 in Wai'anae, on O'ahu. His father, Inokichi Matsuo, worked for Gaspro Company; his mother, Kikuyo Yamashita Matsuo, was a homemaker and raised eight children. When he was in the seventh grade he and his family moved to Kalihi.

Active in athletics most of his life, Matsuo was schooled at Kalakaua Intermediate School and Farrington High School. He graduated from the University of Hawai‘i with a degree in sociology.

After graduation from high school, he was a warehouse worker for Hawaiian Pineapple Company. He was then drafted into the U.S. Army where he served for two years.

In 1951, he began working at Pālama Settlement as a social worker responsible for organizing clubs. The following year, he became the athletic director. In 1955, he left Pālama Settlement for a job in recreation at the U.S. Navy submarine base.

He retired after thirty-one years. He is married and lives in Pearl City.
HY: It's January 13, 1998, and this is an interview with Kiyoshi Matsuo for the Pālama Settlement project. We're at his home in Pearl City. The interviewer is Holly Yamada.

Okay, let's start with when and where were you born?

KM: I was born March 20, 1927 in Waiʻanae, Oʻahu.

HY: And did you grow up in Waiʻanae?

KM: I attended elementary school through the seventh grade, then I moved to Kalihi.

HY: What did your parents do?

KM: My father [Inokichi Matsuo] worked for Gaspro Company, which was producing lime. They had a quarry there and he worked there until he contracted asthma. So they had to release him and that's the reason why we had to move.

HY: Did he contract asthma as a result of his . . .

KM: His work. Of his work.

HY: He did?

KM: Yes.

HY: And what did your mom [Kikuyo Yamashita Matsuo] do?

KM: She stayed home, she was a housewife, yeah.

HY: Where in the birth order are you?

KM: I'm one, two. . . . I'm the third son and the sixth child.

HY: Out of seven?
KY: Seven. No, eight, out of eight.

HY: When your father—when you folks moved into Kalihi, what did your father end up doing?

KM: He couldn’t work anymore.

HY: Oh, I see.

KM: So my sisters and my brothers supported the family.

HY: Oh, I see—your older siblings?

KM: Yes.

HY: Do you know anything about your grandparents’ background?

KM: No, I don’t. I know where they came from, Kumamoto, Japan. But I’ve never met them, my mom didn’t want to go back, so I don’t know. I’ve never had any information on them.

HY: So were your parents born here?

KM: No, they came from Japan. They were immigrants.

HY: I see. Do you know when they came?

KM: No, I don’t.

HY: Okay. Do you know where your mom grew up?

KM: In Japan.

HY: I mean after she got here then—she was an adult when she came here?

KM: Yeah, she was a picture bride.

HY: Oh, I see.

KM: She was a picture bride and she lived, as far as I know, in Lualualei, O‘ahu, which is above Wai‘anae. Then we moved down to Wai‘anae later on. And I was born in Wai‘anae so I don’t know what year they moved down.

HY: And was your father with Gaspro at the time he married your mom? Or was he . . .

KM: I don’t think so. You know, long ago, the parents never talked about their lives, you know?

HY: Yeah, I know.

KM: So, and we never asked, so I don’t know.
HY: Okay, so what are your memories of before you moved to Kalihi then? What do you remember?

KM: We did a lot of things on our own. We had a camp of about thirteen families and a lot of them had boys—and girls. But the boys normally got together and played stickball, softball, you know? And we always hurt (chuckles) because we had no field. Where we played was full of rocks, so if you slid you got hurt. We had to walk about a mile to school and walk a mile back. And while in elementary school, we had to attend both the English school and Japanese[-language] school. You know, parents wanted us to learn Japanese, so we had to attend both schools. So by the time we got home, was about 5:30, 6:00 [P.M.] every day. But it was a lot of fun.

HY: What was the language spoken at home? Was it Japanese?

KM: The siblings spoke English, but when we spoke to our parents, we had to speak Japanese. So that's why we had to go to Japanese school so we knew what to say to them.

(Laughter)

HY: Do you remember any favorite subjects at school?

KM: Math, I liked math. Gee, I know I had a good background in English when I went to Kalākaua Intermediate [School]. The teacher was John Reinecke. I didn't know he was a Communist then, but he was a good teacher and he stressed English and I learned a lot of English from him. But I don't remember learning that type of thing in elementary school. So it was a revelation for me.

HY: But you've always liked math?

KM: Yeah, even in intermediate I took algebra. So, and I liked it then. I guess I could have gone into another field like engineering but I was drafted right out of high school. So I lost my interest in math and I went into social work. My degree is in sociology.

HY: At UH [University of Hawai‘i], you got your degree?

KM: Yes.

HY: Maybe you could describe your home a little bit—in your small kid time.

KM: Oh, yeah. We always had chores to do. We had no electricity for the stove, we had no electrical stove, no gas stove. So we had to cook, my mom had to cook, by wood. And in our area, we had a lot of kiawe trees, so we had to go out there, cut the tree into logs, make it into timber so that we can burn it, so she could cook.

HY: Was it an indoor stove?

KM: No, they had another (shed for the stove).

HY: And did you share that with . . .
KM: No, each family had its own. And each family had to go get its own wood. So I remember that, and I remember—oh, we also had to, I had to, mop the floor every day. Because it was wooden floor, and because we were living near a quarry, you had a lot of dust. So every day you had dust on the floor, so every day you had to mop the floor. And as long as I can remember, I had to mop the floor every day.

HY: That was your main chore?

KM: Yeah, and the other chore was to cut lumber, the kiawe trees, to make the fire.

HY: What was the house like itself? How many rooms did it have?

KM: Two bedrooms, one living room, and a kitchen where she washed the dishes. We had running water. Our bathroom was outside and that was a shed where four families shared. Each one had its own, but all the bathrooms were located in one building. So if you want to go to the bathroom you have to go to the outside. Even at night. (Laughs)

Let me see, I remember my oldest brother had to quit school. Since my father lost his job, he had to go to work. So he worked for the Wai`anae Plantation for a while. And that’s the way it was for all the families. It’s always the oldest son that had to quit school to support the family. But I don’t remember we being poor, although now I realize we didn’t have much. But at that time, we didn’t know. We had no way of comparing ourselves to somebody else because the whole camp was in the same predicament.

HY: Was it a Japanese camp or a mixed camp . . .

KM: No, no, yeah, mixed. Well, I remember one house had a Filipino family. Gee, there was one man by himself. He was single, I don’t know what nationality he was. It was predominantly Japanese. That’s right. I think the only non-Japanese may have been the single man and the Filipino family.

HY: Who was the disciplinarian in your family?

KM: My mom.

HY: Oh yeah?

KM: Yeah. My mom. Somehow my father never got involved in disciplining us. It was always my mom. And you know, whatever she says, we listened. If she raised her voice, we knew she was angry. (Laughs)

HY: How did she discipline you guys? Just by raising her voice?

KM: Yeah, raising her voice, never struck us. But you knew she was angry about something by her gestures and whenever she raised her voice we knew she was very, very angry.

HY: Did you play with your other siblings?

KM: Oh yeah, with my two younger brothers. And when we played ball it was always the three of
us going out to play with other kids, you know.

HY: The other kids in the camp.
KM: In the camp, yeah.

HY: So other than sports, were there other kinds of recreational activities that you did?
KM: Well, we went fishing, swimming, because the beach was nearby. Yeah, we learned to swim all by ourselves. We had a swimming hole, we found a swimming hole so we went there. And somehow we got some bamboo and we got some fishing line and we spent some time fishing.

HY: Did you catch fish, fish to eat?
KM: No, just for fun. Because the type of fish we caught were all the reef-type fish like hīnālea. At that time they were all so small you couldn’t eat them. The other thing we did was we waited for the pineapple train a lot. Because when the pineapple train... See, long ago, there was a track around Ka'ena Point. So when the pineapple was harvested from the Hale'iwa, Waialua side, it came around there. It wasn't trucked in before, it was by train. So when we heard the train, we'd run to the track and wave to the man and then he would throw pineapple to us, so that's the time we ate pineapple. (Laughs)

HY: Was that part of the O'ahu Rail[way & Land Co.]?
KM: Yeah. That's right.

HY: Oh, I see. So when you moved to Kalihi then, what was your home like?
KM: Yeah, we moved, one, two, three times. The first, we had one, two, three bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, there she [KM's mother] had a gas stove. And the bathroom was inside. Gee, and we lived near King Street. And at that time, my sisters were old enough to work, so they went to work, and my two older brothers went to work also to support the family. I think I was thirteen? Thirteen years old I think at that time. So I couldn't go to work. We had a neighbor who was working for USED [U.S. Engineer Department] and my mom talked to him when I was fourteen and I worked at USED across Kapālama School, illegally. (Laughs)

HY: When you were fourteen?
KM: Yes.

HY: What did you do?
KM: I worked in a warehouse, stacked whatever materials they had to stack. Because this was during a time just before the war.

HY: Yeah, you were...

KM: Yeah, I'd be fourteen, 1941. I wasn't of age but since the man was a foreman and my mom asked him... See I used to---since I lived near King Street, I used to hang around on the
corner of King and Mokaua [streets], and we had that group of guys that became a gang. And one of the gangs eventually was involved in drugs and his name was Harold “Biggie” Chan. And he was shot to death. And my mom was anxious for me to get out of that environment.

HY: Well, you know when you say “gangs,” is that different than how gangs are today?

KM: Oh yeah. We always got together, we didn’t go around looking for trouble, but if there was someone that came and wanted to move in our territory, then he was confronted. So we had territorial rights.

HY: And that was your corner?

KM: Yeah.

HY: And did you guys fight with each other? Different gangs or other people that were in the territory? Or . . .

KM: If they came, yeah.

HY: How did you establish your territory?

KM: Well, I guess . . .

HY: Through fighting?

KM: Yeah, yeah. It was fistfights.

HY: Fistfights?

KM: Not with chains or knives or guns.

HY: Yeah. Did you have a name? Did you call yourselves . . .

KM: No, no, no.

HY: So no jackets or paraphernalia?

KM: No, no.

HY: And then did you folks play sports together, too? Was that part of the . . .

KM: No, then my sports background is different.

HY: Oh, okay.

KM: We frequented Kalihi Union Church. And, oh yeah, some of the guys in our corner gang was interested in playing basketball so we frequently went to Kalihi Waena park or Kalihi Union Church, and at that time I met some people from Kalihi Union Church that was interested in sports. And not only basketball, but other things, other sports like baseball, softball, and I was
interested in that. So eventually, I started going there. I left my corner gang group and I went there. And my mother was so happy because lot of the people that were in the gang at the corner all landed in prison.

HY: Who else was in your gang?

KM: [Harold K.] "Biggie" Chan. Oh, I forgot his first name, but Silva. Oh, there was a Japanese guy, but I forgot his name now. The three of them landed in prison. Another guy was Eddie Silva. He was not old enough to go to prison.

HY: You know, you have an interesting nickname. How’d you get . . .

KM: From the gang.

HY: From the—yeah, that’s what I was wondering. Your nickname is “Knuckles.”

KM: Yeah, yeah.

HY: So they called you that?

KM: Yeah, we all had nicknames. See, Harold Chan was “Biggie.” Oh, there was another—Sam Bailey. Somehow, we didn’t have a nickname for him. And “Pussy” Silva, I forgot already. It’s been so long.

HY: How did you end up with that nickname?

KM: Well, by fighting.

HY: Oh, okay. So then you got more involved in . . .

KM: In sports, yeah.

HY: Sports activities.

KM: Yeah, yeah.

HY: And this was a different group?

KM: Yeah, different group guys.

HY: And at this time you were also at Kalākaua Intermediate and this is when you had John Reinecke?

KM: Yeah.

HY: How else did he influence you?

KM: You had to put your mind to studying.
HY: Ah, so he made you a better student.

KM: Yeah, well he and another teacher, algebra teacher, Mr. [Koichi] Harada, they were the ones that influenced me a lot. You know, you gotta bear down on your studies and not fool around, you know? And also when you come from our age, you respect the teacher. You don’t talk back to them and you’re there to obey them. And when they reinforce the idea that, hey, you can’t fool around in class, you have to put your minds to studying, that had a great impact on me.

HY: Was your warehouse job then just a summer job?

KM: Yes, that’s the summer.

HY: Did you do that for more than . . .

KM: Only one year.

HY: One year.

KM: Then after that, I worked at a cannery every summer in high school, so I worked there three summers in a cannery. And then, well, even after I graduated, I went back. I worked at Libby [McNeill & Libby] cannery, but when I was hired after my senior year, the fruits were not ripe. When I worked there, I worked in a receiving line, and what they called us was the “dumpers.” See, the bulk of the pineapple came in boxes like this and you had two people grab, one person grab one end, you grab another, and you flip it right into the conveyer belt. I did that for three summers. In the fourth summer, I went back, the fruits were not ripe so there were no trains coming in, so I didn’t do anything. So I didn’t want to just stand around doing nothing, and they were paying me just to go check the fire hydrants, the fire extinguishers. I wanted to do something physical because I wanted to stay in condition. I was playing football in high school and I wanted to play football in the university, so I wanted to stay in shape. So I asked my friends from high school, “Eh, where are you working?” And they said Hawaiian Pine[apple Co. Ltd.]. So he [KM’s friend] said, “Oh, my uncle is a foreman at Hawaiian Pine and if you want to work, you can come and work in the warehouse and you can work on your legs.” We were [working with pineapple] bran. The brans were all in big sacks, about forty-pound sacks. They came off a conveyer and we had to grab them and walk and stack them all up in a warehouse. So I quit my job at Libby and I went to work for Hawaiian Pine at that time.

HY: Do you remember what your pay was there at the cannery?

KM: I think a dollar, dollar-quarter an hour, something like that.

HY: And then you did this through your, all through your high school summers.

KM: Yes, only summers. And all the money went to my mother. I couldn’t keep a single penny. You know, I gave it all to her.

HY: What did you do for your own spending money?
KM: I asked her whenever I need it. For instance, if we wanted to go to a football game, I’ll have to ask her for car fare because we lived in Kalihi and the game was in Mō‘ili‘ili at the old Honolulu Stadium. So we had to catch the streetcar, because at that time was a streetcar, then later on they changed to a trolley.

HY: Who cared for your father then?

KM: My mom.

HY: So he was at home?

KM: Yeah.

HY: And then the income that was coming in was from all the siblings?

KM: Yes.

HY: So all you folks still lived together then?

KM: Yes.

HY: And you said, you mentioned that you lived in several different places in Kalihi?

KM: Yeah, all in Kalihi.

HY: Yeah.

KM: Maybe the rent was so high at one place so we had to move. (Laughs) I don’t know, all I know is that we moved.

HY: And did you have any contact with Pālama Settlement, when you . . .

KM: At that time?

HY: Yeah.

KM: No.

HY: Were you aware of it?

KM: Yes, because a lot of the kids from Farrington [High School], you know, Farrington’s population was from Kalihi and Pālama. So when I played football at Farrington, I got to know a lot of the guys from Pālama, because a lot of them came from Pālama.

HY: What kind of impression did you have of Pālama at that time?

KM: It was a good place to play sports. (Laughs) And I read a lot about the type of athletes that came from Pālama. You know, like Elmo Tomita, he was very good. Bill Gee was good. Bobby [Robert] Kau learned to play basketball there, a lot of athletes came from there.
HY: So you kind of looked up to those [athletes].

KM: Yeah, yeah.

HY: I see. Who were some of your teachers at Farrington?

KM: I remember Mr. (A.M.) Young in physics and Mr. [Akiyoshi] Hayashida (in algebra II). When I was attending high school, naturally my family didn’t have much money so what I did was I wore whatever practice uniform that the school gave. So I wore it to school for my daily use. One day Mr. Hayashida called me aside, he said, “Oh, Kiyoshi, I want to talk to you.” I said, okay. I thought I did something wrong. He said, “Oh, I would appreciate it if you go home and tell your mother from now on you don’t wear the jersey tops anymore. You wear shirt, regular shirt, with buttons.” And he was my second-year algebra teacher. He was my trigonometry teacher. So I thought highly of him. I thought, chee, this guy’s a smart guy. So he made a lasting impression on me and the other man was Mr. (A.M.) Young who taught chemistry and physics. And I thought he was smart, too. So I thought very highly of those two people.

HY: Who were some of your classmates you were close with at that time?

KM: Well, Joe [Joseph] Tom was the one I knew when I started going to Kalihi Union Church to play. And he and I played football, basketball, and baseball together. But he was one year ahead of me, but he made a lasting impression on me. And that’s the guy that my mom said lucky I met him, because I might be in prison today otherwise.

And let’s see, some of the other people, Willy [William] Nakagawa became a dentist. I didn’t know too much about him in school but I knew his brother because his brother and I played baseball together. He was older than William but I played baseball with him. Clifford Kuwamoto became a dentist, but he died. He didn’t play sports, but he was a good student. Wally Yonamine was my classmate and we got along well together. And he became real famous. But he was too old—other than football—he was too old to play other sports for the school because there was an age limitation. And I didn’t know he was two years older than me, but I found out recently that he is. He still remains a good friend, I see him every now and then. Robert Takeshita, he became a professional boxer.

Lot of them, the ones I was associated with, all played sports. Very few of them were not jocks. Gee, I know we had Richard Kaulukukui who played only one year with us but he was the same age with me. He was the brother of Tommy [Kaulukukui] who was the athletic director at UH when I went to UH. And his brother is Sol[omon Kaulukukui], we played together at UH. Oh, Richard was a good man. Let me see, I can name the entire eleven, starting eleven of our championship team. Gee, people from Pālama, Charlie Choo came from Pālama. I met his brother, Andy at UH.

HY: When you played at Farrington, you played sports with him at Farrington?

KM: Yeah, Charlie. Yeah, yeah. That’s how I got to know him. The Tsuruda boys I got to know. They’re from all from Pālama, Richard and Larry [Tsuruda]. And that’s how I got to know them, so when I started work at Pālama, I knew lot of the older guys, so I had no trouble. You see, when you move into Pālama, if you’re a non-local or non-Pālama Kalihi boy, you would
have a hard time assimilating because they always keep a distance from you. But I had no trouble because I knew all the older kids, all the guys, older guys about my age or little older, maybe one or two years younger, so the kids knew that, so I had no trouble getting all the kids together.

HY: What age group of kids did you work with there?

KM: Oh, when I first started, I started 1951, right out of school.

HY: Did you graduate in '51?

KM: Yes, I started in '47. . . . Okay, let me think, go back a little bit. After high school, I worked at Hawaiian Pine and then I was drafted and I served two years in the army. I was assigned to the military police to guard the ammunition depot on the Aliamanu Crater. And I didn't like the job. So when the opportunity came up that we could sign up to go to Japan for one year, and this was in the occupational forces, so I went. I told them, chee, I like to go, because I don't like what I'm doing now and I like to see what Japan is like. I felt that, gee, if I don't go now, I'll never see Japan. So I went, and I was, because of my athletic background in high school, in special services. And in special services, I tried out for the 7th Army basketball team and I made the team and I traveled all over Japan with the team. And we played against other military installations at that time. So . . .

HY: This was in, uh, I'm trying to . . .


HY: Forty-six, okay.

KM: Yeah. The war ended in 1945, and in 1946 I was in Japan and that's with the occupational forces.

HY: And you were there for a year?

KM: Yeah, one year.

HY: Was that your . . . I guess that's the activity that sort of stands out in your mind, yeah? Playing sports?

KM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HY: Basketball.

KM: Well, at that time, they didn't have a football team, so the basketball announcement came out and I said, oh, I want to try then, because I played in high school. I figured, if they're better than me, then I won't make the team, but if I work hard enough, I would be on the team, so I did. So I was selected and then we traveled, as I said, all over Japan. When we traveled, we had Pullman. So we were able to sleep, we went from Yokohama to Kobe, which was an overnight trip, so we were able to have bunks. All the Japanese nationals had to stand up. All night long. We were given the luxury of the Pullman coaches and we didn't have to rush to
get to the train, whereas the Japanese nationals, they all had to have the people pushers. I felt so sorry for them. But, it's the facts of life I guess. You're the defeated nation, you have to suffer a little bit.

HY: Were you with other people from Hawai'i?

KM: Yes. What, in Japan?

HY: Yeah.

KM: Yeah. We had some local boys in the . . .

HY: Lot of local boys?

KM: Yeah, but I was the only Hawai'i boy on the basketball team. All the rest were from the Mainland.

Then after that, I got out in '47 and I started attending university at that time on the G.I. Bill [of Rights]. But I guess Tommy knew where I came from so he offered me a part-time job to earn some money. And some of (the) people that worked part-time with me was his brother Sol Kaulukukui. We had to prepare the baseball field. Harold Silva, (who) become a (teacher and) coach at Kahuku; Phil Haake, who became a probation officer on Maui; and I [did] laundry for the football team. (Laughs) We had to wash all of their laundry.

HY: Did they have uniforms? For the football team?

KM: Oh yeah.

HY: Oh, they did?

KM: Oh yeah. Yeah, we had the rainbow-colored top. We played lot of local teams and we played some college teams, too. We played Michigan State [University] one year, we got smashed, 68-21. We played Stanford [University] one year, we got smashed, 75-0.

HY: Oh, you really?

(Laughter)

HY: Did you know what field you wanted to study when you came back?

KM: No. Something very interesting. Out of high school, I wanted to go to the university, so we had to take the entrance exam and when I learned from the school—and I took it for engineering, because I wanted to concentrate on math—and they told me I didn’t qualify for engineering because I did not have trigonometry. But I told them, hey, wait a minute, why don’t you go back and check my high school record, because I did have trigonometry in high school, in my senior year. But by the time they came back to me, I was gone. I was drafted. So when I returned, I figured, oh, I'll go into arts and science to find out what university is all about before I decide on my major. So I started off. . . . And you had to designate a major at that time before you attended. It's not like—I don’t know what it's like now, but at that time,
they say, oh okay, you want to major in something, and then they'll accept you. So I said, maybe what I'll do is I'll get into business or economics. And I started—oh! Then in my sophomore year—after my freshman year, I felt like, oh it's not that interesting—so I changed to sociology because I wanted to get involved with the youngsters.

HY: What was it that made you have that change of...

KM: The subject was not interesting to me. Like, in business, you had to take economics, you had to take bookkeeping, money and banking. It was very foreign to me, and I figured there must be other fields. I didn't think about teaching, maybe I should have at that time, but teaching never entered my mind. But in retrospect, maybe that was a better field. But I figured, oh, I have found out that in sociology you work with people and sometimes you can with young people, so I figured that would be a good field for me. So that's why I changed to soci and I graduated with a sociology degree.

HY: And that was in, you're saying that was in '51?

KM: I graduated in '51.

HY: And then you started at Pālama Settlement?

KM: Yeah, well, see, I knew I was graduating, so I was in the athletic director's office, Tommy Kaulukukui. I wanted to thank him for what he did for me in school. And at that time, the [executive] director of Pālama Settlement [Dearon J. Shetanian], just by chance, was in Tommy's office. Apparently they knew each other. And the guy said, eh, he's looking for a man for a position in his social work department and Tommy said, "Eh, here's a man for you." (Laughs)

HY: So that's why you got the job.

KM: I wasn't even interviewed. So I got the job right there. In fact, before I got my sheepskin, I was at the job.

HY: Was that a full-time position?

KM: Yeah, full-time position. The pay was $226 a month. (Laughs) And I found out that teachers were receiving $225 a month.

HY: And where were you living then?

KM: In Kalihi.

HY: So after you came back from Japan, you came back home?

KM: Yeah, yeah.

HY: Maybe you can talk a little bit about what your duties were there.

KM: Okay.
HY: And what you actually do.

KM: [For] social work, my responsibility initially was to organize clubs. Get the kids involved in clubs and teach them the fundamentals of life. And fortunately, as I said, I knew lot of the older guys, so I had no trouble getting to know the younger kids because they saw me talking to the older guys and normally those are the brothers, the older brothers. So when I went to talk to the younger kids, I was able to establish immediate rapport with them. And I told them, “Hey, we want to do something for you, but we want you to get involved in a group, so let’s get some guys together and start talking about what we can do as a group.” And that’s how we started.

HY: What age group were you working with?

KM: Oh, all groups. Seven, eight, nine [year olds]. And then ten to twelve and twelve to fifteen [year olds]. The ones beyond that, they were not involved in that. Until I got into the sports side. When I became the athletic director, then that’s the time. . . . I talked to the older boys more about team sports and that’s how we got involved.

HY: What kind of things did you actually organize then, as you put these clubs together? What activities did they do?

KM: Okay. We went to camp trips, on camping. Because Pālama had a Pālama-by-the-Sea Camp. This was before they had that Pālama Uka. It was right by the ocean. We spent lot of times saying, hey, what can we do at the camp? Or what do we need to take to the camp? And sometimes we had to make the kids plan their own menus, like beef stew, spaghetti. All they wanted was quantity, never mind the quality.

(Laughter)

HY: Lots of quantity.

KM: Because let’s face it, Pālama is a low-income area. Lot of times at home, they don’t get enough to eat.

HY: Would they—-they did the cooking then, too?

KM: Oh no, no, no, no. We had to do the cooking for them. They’d come and serve and clean up and that type of thing. But as they grew older, ten to twelve, yeah, they could prepare the vegetables for the beef stew or whatever.

But, let’s see, what other things did we do? Oh, we had some craft programs for them as a group. We took them swimming as a group. Lot of them didn’t know how to swim because they didn’t have the opportunity to go the ocean so we lowered the swimming pool water level so they could get in there and learn how to swim. There was an instructor there from the athletic side who taught them kicking, breathing, floating, and eventually swimming.

Let’s see. And we took them on field trip like the zoo, because the zoo was in existence. We took them where everything was free though. The aquarium was charging, so we couldn’t go to the aquarium. They didn’t have any money. Fortunately, Pālama had a truck, so we could
transport the kids to the different sites. At that time, there was no rule against the kids riding in the back of the trucks. So what we did was get two-by-twelve planks and go right across the [back of the] trucks, and they all sat like that. Fortunately, nobody fell off the truck, come to think of it.

(Laughter)

HY: Think we're going to run out of tape here.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDETWO

KM: Gee, I did [social work] for about a year, and then the athletic director at that time was Bill Gee. I think he was doing it on a part-time basis and the director said they needed a full-time athletic director. So I told him, “Gee, if that’s the case, I’d be interested in it. Would you consider my application?”

He said, “Oh, if you want it, you can have it.”

So, then I moved into the athletic side and then I started working with the teenagers more than the younger kids. And about that time Lorin Gill came on, on staff. So he took my position as the social worker.

And when I went to the PE [physical education] department, athletic side, since I knew there were clubs there already, I worked closely with them to get them in the athletic side. Because I don’t remember when I was in the social work side whether they had organized activities for the kids in the athletic side. So I told them, hey, it’s a good time for them to learn how to play basketball, to play volleyball, to play baseball or softball. So we had the natural setting for that. You know, with that group situation, we’d bring them over and teach the kids as groups. And that was right after school was out, so it did not interfere with the high school kids. When the high school kids were out of school, they came over and took over the gym or whatever other facilities were available.

And when I was in the PE department, Tommy Kaulukukui called me up. He said, “Hey, how about giving me a hand.” He wants to organize a Pop Warner League. Pop Warner football league. I tell him, yeah, I think the kids will go for it. However, I told him, “Hey, but the kids around here, don’t have money. How are they gonna get the equipment?”

He said, “Well, what we’ll do is have a fund-raiser and then give each team so many shoulder pads, so many headgears.” So that’s how the Pop Warner League started, because of Tommy.

HY: What kind of fund-raising did you have to do?

KM: Oh, all kinds of sales. Sweet bread sales, manapua sale. Anything you can think of, candy sales. That type of thing. Each team was supposed to sell so much. And we must have met the goal because we had all the equipment later on. But our kids did well. Because we played in
the Mele Kalikimaka Bowl which was near Christmas Day and Kailua beat us. And this was the first time that any of the kids from Pālama ever played regular football. But we had good bunch of boys. Several of the boys, because of that, were given football scholarships to private schools. Two went to ‘Iolani [School], I think one went to Saint Louis [School], none went to Punahou [School] though. I think that’s about all that went. But beyond that, that was the start of the football, Pop Warner League. The kids were always looking ahead for the next season. However, we also had other things for the older teenagers. I organized them into going into the citywide basketball leagues, going to different parks to play. And they had a good time. Here again, because of the truck, we would transport the kids from Pālama to whatever site we were playing.

And, well couple of times, I had to take the kids to Pālama-by-the Sea as groups. So, and being that these were older kids, I took them. And there, they cooked their own meals.

HY: You know, when you were a social worker, were there any particular problems that these kids had that you had to deal with as a social worker?

KM: You mean behavior problems?

HY: Well I guess any you know, yeah, behavior problems or . . .

KM: Well, there were . . .

HY: I mean . . .

KM: Are you from here? You a local girl?

HY: I grew up on the Mainland.

KM: See, long ago, long ago, there was a kid, what was his nickname now? He was always in trouble. His name is Mederios. There was a nickname for him, “Mongoose?” But he’d cause all kind of problems in Pālama because he was always always stealing things.

HY: He was a young kid?

KM: Yeah, young kid. He’d disrupt all kind of activities. And his older brother was no help either because he was another troublemaker. But that kind of problem we face almost every day.

HY: So stealing problems and . . .

KM: Yeah, yeah. But they don’t steal from each other. For some reason, they go out and steal someplace else and bring it back. Sometime they might destroy something at Pālama, but not child-abuse type problems. Not that I know of. Only that type—stealing, fighting, and disrupting the program. But I thought that that was a common thing. So you had to scold the kids and try to control them or discipline them somehow.

HY: Did you have any interaction with the families of some of these kids that came?

KM: Well, I didn’t go to the mothers and fathers. I went to the brothers. And the brothers were the
ones that put kids down, you know. Said, "Hey, you don't do that." So, that's why I say I was very lucky because I knew the older ones. I don't know how other workers dealt with the problem, but I always went to the older brother and said, "Hey, this boy, your brother, is causing lot of problem with his group, so why don't you talk to him and tell him that?" So the next time, the kid goes . . .

HY: And that was an effective way of dealing with it, yeah?

KM: Yeah, yeah.

HY: Who were some of the other social workers that you worked with?

KM: Winifred Ishimoto. She started there. That's why I said she would be a good person to talk to. Well, Lorin Gill, I knew that. And Maki Ichiyasu, she died already, she's gone already. Let me see, [Setsuko] "Sets" Matsuda Nozoe. She's another one. Let me see.

HY: Did you work together, or did you work separately with your own groups? Did the social workers sort of get together and decide how they were going to conduct these clubs and whatnot?

KM: When I was a social worker?

HY: Yeah, when you were a social—I guess that year that you were a social worker.

KM: Yeah, we, we talked, we had meetings once a week. For you know, what we're trying to do with them or for them. Yeah, we generally worked together. See, the male handled the boys group. The female handled the girls group and sometimes we did we interaction, interplay, that type of thing. We always talked together what we were trying to do.

HY: Did you have a—I guess for lack of a better word—a philosophy about what you were trying to do with these clubs and how you were helping these kids?

KM: Well, one, we were just trying to make a better citizen. Obey the law, help each other, that type of thing. I think we didn't go beyond that. I think we had enough on our hands. (Laughs) I think what we tried to do was have them enjoy themselves while they were there. You know, have a good time so they remember when they grew older. And it's amazing, when I went back, for the 100-year luau, all the young kids are adults now and they still remember it. [Pālama Settlement celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1996.]

HY: Yeah.

KM: Yeah. Yeah, that was real nice.

HY: So you became athletic director then in '52?

KM: Yeah, yeah.

HY: And how long were you there for?
KM: I left in December of '55. And I left with much apprehension, because I never worked for the federal government before and the announcement [for a job] came out in the paper. I said the pay is better than what I was earning and I had to think about my future. And I asked Mr. [Walter] Ehlers, who was then the [executive] director, “What is the maximum I can earn here?” And he told me he doesn’t know, because it wasn’t within his power. Because lot of the money that Pālama received came from the [Honolulu] Community Chest. At that time, was Community Chest, later on, it became Aloha United Way. And it depends on what the fund-raising effort raised. So he cannot answer that. So I tell him, “Oh well, I’m sorry, but I have seen in the paper that there was a job with the federal government. They were looking for someone and I’m going to apply.” So he said, well, he cannot do anything about that. So I told him, “You know, I really like my job here, I know lots of the people, lots of the families, lots of the men and women, and I have nothing against the job. So I’m very apprehensive about leaving, but at the same time I got to think about my future.”

He said, “Yeah, I don’t blame you.”

So I applied and I got the job with the federal government. And they told me, if you want to work here, you have to here, be on board before the end of the year. So I was hired on December 28th. (Laughs) But that was a big decision for me.

When I started as a AD [athletic director] at Pālama Settlement, I organized an advisory committee. Because I wanted the people from long ago that dealt with Pālama to let me know more about the history of Pālama. So I got people who were knowledgeable and prominent to sit on the board. And they say, “Yeah, more than happy to.”

And I told them, “You know, I’m asking you to volunteer, so whatever you tell me, I’ll take it as a wisdom, your word of wisdom, and I’ll follow that.” I told them, “At the same time, there may be some changes, because what you did before, may not be good now.” See, long ago, Pālama was known for its athletics—the Flying P, you know. And they had good football teams, they get good basketball teams, and lot of the players from those teams were really good athletes. And I think they could have gone to colleges if they had enough money or the smarts. But the board, advisory board, said, oh, they’d be willing to sit. (I felt that if I could interest some of the former athletes of Pālama Settlement to volunteer their time and effort to sit on the board, I could gain much background information about the sports program or Pālama. It could also serve to rekindle their interest in Pālama.)

HY: Who were some of the people you asked to sit on the advisory board?

KM: Well, one prominent member was Stan Kudo. He was born and raised in Pālama and he eventually worked for . . . . The piers, that warehouse, the wharf and what’s the name of that company [Alexander & Baldwin, Inc.]? Bill Gee was another one, he said, yeah, because he [had been] the AD there and he played sports there. And I asked Bobby Rath, because Bobby also swam for Pālama, and he, being the son of the founder, he said he’d be more than happy. So those are some of the people that served on the board. (They selected Stan Kudo as chairman.)

But when I decided to leave, I asked Stan, “Hey, you know, I have a job offer, (from the federal government). What do you think?”
He said, "You know, if I were you, I would go if they choose you."

So I said, "Yeah, that's my thinking now, but I wanted to hear your side."

He said, "Yeah, I think you're making a wise decision." So I left. And I stayed there for thirty-one years.

HY: This is the sub base?

KM: Yes, submarine base. Yup. I rose from being a recreation specialist sports to the M.W.R. director. So, it was a good move for me, and for my family, too.

HY: Did you use your sociology training as well?

KM: No, I used more my athletic [training]. Oh, no, in the organization side, I did. Yeah, yeah. I relied on what I learned from working at Pālama and applied it to whatever task I had at sub base.

HY: How different was that, working with these Pālama kids and now you're with the military?

KM: Well at sub base, it was all with adults. And I was the only civilian there and the rest were all military, so I had to work through the military to get anything done. And that's where I had to use all my knowledge and smarts from my social work days. (Laughs) Oh yeah, yeah, it came in real handy. And we expanded. When I went there, our budget was about $400,000, by the time I left, was $2 million. So it was good.

HY: You know, you mentioned you kind of put these people on the advisory board at Pālama, were there changes that came about as a result of that?

KM: Well, they felt that Pālama should be represented more in competition, because these people were all competitive people when they were younger. So when I started, we're not thinking about going out to the community to play against other teams. It was only [to] play within Pālama, but they said we should try. So when that call came from Tommy Kaulukukui [about organizing a Pop Warner League], I said, "Man, that would be a good opportunity for the young kids, to go out [in the community] and play." So that's one of the things that came out. So in a way, was very good. And prior to then, they never went to the citywide competition, that type of thing. They always played within clubs like that. That's how the social work—when I went there at least—and the athletic side, we work together.

HY: And all during this time, the sports activities were separated by girls and boys, is that right?

KM: Yes. And that's the time where I asked Mr. Ehlers to have a female on the staff. Because I told him, "Hey, I'm not, I'm not that keen on the female side. I'm keen on the boys side, but you need somebody else for the women's side." And that's how Bertha [Lee Nahoopii] was hired.

HY: So that was your idea?

KM: Yeah, yeah. And she worked out as well, you know. She's very athletic, very nice person.
HY: Who did they have teaching the girls prior to . . .

KM: It was all mixed, like swimming.

HY: Were they volunteers or . . .

KM: No, they, no, the girls didn’t come to the PE side often. They stayed in the social work side. But when Bertha came, then they started using that PE side program. So then we had to work out schedules. Hey, this is the time for the women to use the gym, this is the time for the women to use the swimming pool. So it was real nice for them.

HY: Did you play sports, too, during this time? Were you also involved, or was it mostly coaching and organizing?

KM: I was just organizing. I played---the only time I think I played with the older guys was softball, when we played in different leagues outside. And these are the guys that attended Farrington and they asked me to play with them, while I was working there. So after work or weekends we would play. So I retained my contact with them, not because only of my job, but because of my sports background. So it, as I say, it was very easy for me.

HY: Did you use the facilities at Pālama?

KM: No.

HY: No, okay.

KM: No, no. We went outside to play.

HY: Was there any other kind of responsibilities you had as the athletic director that we didn’t cover?

KM: Well, you always had to prepare budgetary requirements, that comes with the job. Work assignments, that type of thing, but that comes with the job. The one thing I didn’t like and I still, to this day, I still don’t understand, was the fact that to use a facility I was told that the kids had to have membership fee. And I went to see the director once, Mr. Ehlers. I told him, “You know, I think your requirement of a membership fee is contrary to what the philosophy of the settlement is. Because the settlement was founded to help the poor families in the Pālama area. Now if you make a membership fee, no matter what the cost was, you’re discouraging the kids from coming. And if you don’t have the kids come in, why do you have the facility here?” But he said, well, this was incorporated long time ago and apparently he didn’t see eye-to-eye with me on that. So I told him, “Well, I’ll enforce it, but at the same time, I disagree with it.”

HY: Were there kids that you felt really just could not pay the small membership?

KM: Oh, there were a lot of kids. Lot of kids.

HY: And did they . . .
KM: I would let them play anyway. We let them play. I know the Mederios family had three boys and I’m sure the family couldn’t afford it. So when they came, I tell, “Let them swim.”

HY: What happened to this kid, Mederios?

KM: He landed in the O’ahu prison [O’ahu Community Correctional Center]. When (my wife) and I were walking down the street, here comes a truck with all the prisoners and (someone calls me by my nickname. So I wave back and call his name and yell, “I didn’t know you were in prison.” My wife said, “I didn’t know you knew people in O’ahu prison.”)

(Laughter)

HY: Shady past.

KM: No, but he landed in prison. The other, older brother work for Hawaiian Electric [Company]. I see him every now and then. Or another guy from Pālama was Moses Kealoha. He was prominent with Servco [Pacific Inc.], Toyota. Good basketball player, good swimmer. But he didn’t put much effort into swimming. Another good swimmer was [Edward] “Skippa” Diaz. He was a fantastic swimmer, but he was lazy and, and I’m glad he turned to football though, because he became a good football player. I’m just rattling off things that I remember. Gee, some of the other kids . . . Oh, “Mountain Goat,” that’s his name!

HY: Mountain Goat.

KM: Yeah, that’s his nickname. Yeah, he was a real troublemaker, that boy. Another [Mederios]. There were three brothers, but one was worse than the other. But he, I think he was shot and he died. Yeah, he was in robbery or something like that and they shot him. But there were some other good boys that came out of there. Like Harry, Harry Fujinaka? Yeah, he turned out really well. There’re several boys that came up to me at the luau, [each of them] said, you know, he was on the verge of being a criminal, and Pālama saved his life. So I said, “Hey, that’s terrific.”

HY: Did you feel like you were, you were. . . . Being at Pālama, did you feel like you were actually doing that?

KM: No.

HY: Saving people from . . .

KM: No, I didn’t look at it that way. I thought that gee, when I was brought up, you always respect authority and that’s what I try to impress upon the kids, and that’s the only thing I wanted them to know. You don’t go against authority and the police is there to help, they’re not there to harass you and that type of thing. No, no I wasn’t thinking like that.

HY: Did you have much interaction with other outside agencies?

KM: No.

HY: No.
KM: Not, not at Pālama. The only one would be [the state] parks and recreation [department] because they’re the ones, they were the ones organizing the leagues and we wanted our boys to go eventually out and play. So whenever they had the organization meeting, I’d ask them to call us so we’d send our representative there. But that’s the extent of the contact. Maybe the social worker side, at that time, maybe he may have initiated—Lorin Gill was there to get contact with other agencies. Yeah, not the athletic side, maybe the social work side did.

HY: Okay, is there anything else you want to add about Pālama?

KM: No, but those were good years for me.

HY: Then you said you retired after thirty years?

KM: Thirty-one years at sub base, yeah.

HY: Thirty-one, yeah.

KM: Yeah.

HY: Anything else?

KM: No, that’s about all.

HY: Okay, thank you very much.

KM: Oh, you’re welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW
Reflections of Pālama Settlement

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